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Countryman.

A letter to Americans in Europe

London

1859

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FILM SIZE: 35mm REDUCTION RATIO: 10:1 IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA (IIA) IB IIB

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A LETTER

TO

AMERICANS IN EUROPE.

BY A COUNTRYMAN.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

1859.

Price Sixpence.

15 Sept 1915 MS.

A LETTER

TO

AMERICANS IN EUROPE.

In as few words as possible, I would invite my countrymen abroad and at home to consider the existing elements of American prosperity, in comparison with the position of European countries; and while I confess that we have been, of late years, leaning towards something very like admiration for their Governments, I hope a few suggestions may induce a more favourable view of our own institutions.

As the most intimately allied by bonds of commerce, England naturally fills the first rank in our examination. Beyond commercial bonds, I am not prepared to say that alliance is as intimate or as cordial as we have invited England to make it; but at the same time, I neither advocate nor profess any closer relations with the Continental countries of Europe. My belief is that we have suffered materially during the past ten years from too much cordiality on the part of these countries, and that many of our greatest evils are directly attributable to emigration

from the most useless classes of European Continental populations.

Let us, in the first instance, confess our own failings; and we may then with the advantage of more experience examine the weakness that these countries present, and be better fitted to weigh the relative merits of the people on the two sides of the Atlantic.

Mr. H. C. Carey, of Philadelphia, in his "Letters to the President," gives us, in that of December 30th, 1857, a résumé of our sins sufficiently offensive to our pride to gratify the severest European critics on American institutions, and still sufficiently true, making allowance for some political bias on Mr. Carey's part, to be acceptable as a description of dangers that we may have to battle with in the future, if we have not already arrived on the field:—

"Such being the state of things in Northern, we may now look to Central Europe, in regard to which I myself, Mr. President, can speak. Go where the traveller may, he finds, among thoughtful men—among those who had hoped to find in this Western World the realization of their brightest hopes in regard to man's onward progress—a growing doubt in reference to our future. Anxiously do they look across the ocean, dreading to hear of new and more alarming riots—new civil wars—new violations of local rights — new marauding expeditions — new aggressive wars. Ten years since, all was different. They would, then, have regarded as a false prophet the man who had predicted:—

"That, at the close of a single decade, the regular

expenditures of the Federal Government, in a time of peace, would reach seventy millions of dollars—being five times more than they had been but thirty years before:

"That the recipients of this large amount, whether contractors, clerks, or postmasters, would be held liable for the payment of a formal and regular assessment, to be applied to the maintenance in office of the men by whom they had been appointed, or those by whom the contracts had been made:

"That payment of these assessments would be made the condition upon which their own continuance in office should depend:

"That, coincident with these demands upon the *employés* of the Government, all salaries would be largely raised; and that, thus, the treasury should be heavily taxed for purely party purposes and for the promotion of private interests:

"That centralization would be so far perfected, as to enable the Executive to dictate to a body of officials, sixty or eighty thousand in number, all their modes of thought in reference to questions of public interest:

"That a constantly growing difficulty of obtaining —independent of the Government — the means of support, and constant increase in the rewards of public service, would be attended with corresponding increase in the number of claimants for office, and in their subservience to the men at whose pleasure offices were held:

"That the Executive would dictate to members of Congress what should be their course, and publicly

advertise the offices that were to be given to those whose votes should be in accordance with its desires:

"That the growing mental slavery thus indicated would be attended by corresponding growth in the belief that 'one of the chief bulwarks of our institutions' was to be found in the physical enslavement of the labourer:

"That the extension of the area of human slavery would have become the primary object of the Government; and that, with that view, the great Ordinance of 1787, as carried out in the Missouri Compromise, would be repealed:

"That, for the promotion of this object, the treaties with the poor remnants of the native tribes would all be violated:

"That, with the same end in view, wars would be made, piracy encouraged, and territories purchased:

"That the Executive power would so far have grown as to enable it to adopt measures provocative of war, with the view to the spoliation of the weaker neighbours of the Union:

"That it would be officially declared that might makes right, and that, if a neighbouring Power refused to sell the territory whose possession was desired, the Union would then be justified in seizing it:

"That the re-opening of the slave trade would be publicly advocated, and that the first step towards its accomplishment would be taken by a citizen of the United States, in rescinding all the prohibitions of the Central American Governments:

"That the prohibition of slavery in a Central

American State would be considered sufficient reason for the rejection of a treaty:

"That the substitution, throughout all the minor employments of society, of slave labour for that of the freeman, would be publicly recommended by the Executive of a leading State:

"That, while always seeking territory in the South, the rights and interests of the people would be bartered away for the sole and exclusive purpose of preventing annexation in the North:

"That it would be declared that the free navigation of Brazilian rivers was to be obtained, 'amicably if it could, forcibly if it must:'

"That the effect would now be seen, in the entire alienation of the other communities of the Western world:

"That the legislation of the country would have fallen almost entirely under the control of navigation, railroad, and other transportation companies; and that legislators would largely participate with their managers in the profits of enormous grants of money and of public lands:

"That there would have arisen a 'third house of Congress,' composed of lobby members, and embracing men who had filled almost the highest legislative and executive offices, abundantly supplied, to use the words of Colonel Benton, 'with the means required for conciliating members and combining interests,' and thus securing the passage of almost any bill, the applicants for which were willing, sufficiently liberally, to pay:

"That centralization would so far have grown, as

to have caused the expenditures of a single city to almost equal those of the Federal Government but thirty years ago:

"That the expenditure of city revenues and the maintenance of public order would be in the hands of magistrates, many of whom would be regarded as worthy only of the penitentiary:

"That the contest for the distribution of those revenues would become so fierce as to cause the purchase of votes to an extent, and at a price before unknown; and that elections would be carried on by means of bowie-knives, pistols, and even by aid of cannon:

"That manners, morals, or intellect would cease to be deemed essential to the representation of the Union at foreign Courts:

"That religious discord would so far have grown, that the question of the private opinions of a candidate for the Presidency, in regard to matters of religious faith, would be discussed throughout the Union:

"That the discord between the Northern and Southern portions of the Union would have reached the point of civil war, attended with a growing disposition in its various portions to look complacently upon the idea of dissolution: and, finally,

"That Germany, divided and distracted as it was before the formation of the Zolverein, was likely to be reproduced in this Western world—the Union tending steadily towards a dissolution, the result of which would be that the several fragments would become mere tools in the hands of other Powers.

"This is a gloomy picture, and yet it is a true one. Not one of these things would, a few years since, have been believed to be of possible occurrence; and yet, with the exception of this last, they are, one and all, now matters of history."

Any reader at all conversant with America will discover truth in every paragraph of Mr. Carey's attack; but while truth is his text, nearly every paragraph also is indebted to exaggeration for its principal bulk. Our object is, however, to bear in mind that the small beginnings will inevitably end in all the filth that he attaches to us, unless we can trace their origin and check the stream. My conviction is, that we are indebted to Europe for part of the odium, in consequence of many of our American citizens neglecting their duty, and retiring from contact in elections with the brutal population that these countries have thrown on our shores; and part of my object herein is to express the hope that in good time this may change, and that those Americans whose experience has taught them how far superior our populations are to those of Europe, in point of religion, charity, morality, and general well-being of the masses, will find it their duty, on returning to their own country, to use every exertion to render the vicious Government described by Mr. Carey worthy of the people over whom it presides.

Our history in particular, and the history of Europe during the past ten years, teaches us that our form of government requires all the powers of education, intelligence, and morality among the people to insure its stability in the form it originally professed;

and it is quite hopeless, if, as it now appears, the elections are to be turned by classes emigrating from this side of the Atlantic, devoid of all those attributes, and who have left their own countries because they had become worthless members of the community to which they belonged. I am quite ready to admit, and with satisfaction, that our Government must necessarily be more or less vulgar, being of the vulgar; but the word carries no odium with it, so long as we admit no want of morality or intelligence as necessary attributes of those classes, and we remember that energy and enterprise go hand and hand with the so-called vulgar. My supposition is, that we shall, and ere long, find American public opinion strong enough to exclude foreigners from our ballot; and meanwhile it is hopefully refreshing to find, as we all do in Europe, that we are so far degraded in the eyes of the people in these parts that we may hope for some time to come to be deprived of the privilege of supporting their refuse pauper populations.

Had I not imposed upon myself the determination of writing a pamphlet small enough to require little time in reading, the subject of *Slavery* in America ought to form part of it; but the topic is as inexhaustible as the fact is unfortunate and regrettable in our system. Were it not so directly supported by English capital, and so positive an element in the present English system of political economy, one of *our* greatest difficulties in the way of checking it would be removed. I suppose there is no statesman in England but will admit, that England can less

afford to dispense with our slave labour than we can ourselves; and that to-day she is sufficiently awake to the mistake of the great visionary who for so many years has been known as the philanthropist Wilberforce, not to repeat, if she had the power, her experiment, notwithstanding the high moral standard in *argument* of the British periodicals (first and foremost *The Times* newspaper) when an opportunity offers for covering us under "Uncle Tom's Cabin!" Our second grand misfortune in connection with *Slavery* is the intemperate manner in which we handle the subject among ourselves. A system that has had no good effect for the negro up to this point —that, on the contrary, has induced more severe discipline and less education for him—that has forced the Southern planter to invade Northern rights, in connection with the question, in self-defence—has thrown the natural power of man's resistance to doing good under *compulsion*, into the scale against the abolition of slavery:—and meanwhile, those who are familiar with the natural character of the people of the South, believe that they were quietly drifting into minority before the superior energy of the North, and if not awakened and disturbed by indiscreet interference, would have found the *question of slavery* beyond their control in Congress, in good time:—either to be continued with strong protection for the black, or abolished altogether. This latter *abolition* might be opposed on many grounds by *all* parties; had it not become a *political* question, in consequence of the measures of parties in America more remarkable for their own "morality" than for their knowledge of

history of the past, or intimate acquaintance with the affairs of the world they live in.

While confessing our sins, I must fill the measure with the following quotation from Mr. John B. Ireland's "Wall-Street to Cashmere," just published; and every American traveller will recognise the type of our foreign representation, although his experience may not have made him familiar with the individual examples held up, as follows:—

"The great railway to Moscow is in charge of Americans; the Emperor has much confidence in them, and it's pleasant to know that some of them are creditable—the diplomats are rarely so, except to England and France. ——, Chargé to Sweden, defrauded the Government, and left without paying his private debts. At this Court, —— behaved so rudely to the Court, that his recall or absence was requested. ——, our late Minister here, had three appointments to present his credentials, and every time too drunk to keep them; . . . . and when he did get them, made a long harangue to the Emperor. He was so constantly engaged in low debauchery that I'm told a letter was written to General Taylor requesting his recall, or that otherwise the Emperor would be compelled to give him his passport. One of the secretaries, who was left as Chargé, went armed to the ball given on the marriage of the Crown Prince, and getting drunk, swore he'd shoot any one who attempted to remove him. ——, in Prussia, was drunk most of the time—left in debt to every one, and murdered his brother-in-law when he got home, for greater *éclat*. The man who was sent over

with the ratification of the Oregon Treaty stopped at Liverpool for a 'spree.' Our Minister, after hearing of his arrival, waited three days, and then sent to Liverpool; he was there found in a low groggery, beastly intoxicated, with the treaty in his pocket. In Italy, President ——'s brother disgraced the country and himself, *if possible*. . . . . The man sent to succeed him, I heard, was drunk all the time he was there; *besides lots of others I could mention*."

Mr. Carey and Mr. Ireland together, give us an example, perhaps exaggerated, of one effect of government originating with the people; but while we will believe that more effort on the part of those among us who really claim to be Americans, will correct in a great measure such disgraces, we claim positively to-day more prosperity, more general education, more *power*, a standard of *morality* at least equal to England, and superior to any other country in Europe, and a *future* that promises to place us always in advance of others, if we can by any possibility reduce the present power of Aliens in our ballot.

My limits admit of no statistical reports. I believe they are too familiar to our friends in England to require reference, in matters of churches, public school funds, food, manufactures, and shipping. Such information upon elements of our progress should awaken all Americans to a sense of the stake they have at issue, and induce them to put the shoulder to the wheel at home, instead of quietly submitting to a risk of losing all the inestimable blessings that we undoubtedly enjoy over any nation on the earth.

Having suggested what is required at home, I

must glance at the inducement that we find to keep so abroad.

I have never heard one of my countrymen express a wish to be a subject of any petty German Prince, of his extreme highness of Austria, whom all the world condemn *now he is whipped*, or even "*our* Ally," at the head of all the Russias; but England and France offer an asylum to so many of our countrymen from the horrors of bowie-knives and brandy-smashes, who half adopt these countries (at least in argument), that I think we should examine in a few words, the superior benefits they offer to us.

In referring to our country, I have assumed that our virtues are sufficiently known, and have not hesitated to lay bare our vices. In writing of England and France, I also hold that we are all familiar with the honesty of all the respectable classes—the noble pride, energetic enterprise, and industry of the middle ranks—the patriotism of the nobility, and the indomitable courage of those men who fought the late battles in India, and previously in the Crimea, for the former country; while we have had equal experience of the intelligence, the patriotism, and the courage that have just now been displayed in Italy. (The greatest praise that can be said of the latter, is that it *equalled* the British troops at Delhi and Lucknow; and no French officer who has studied the Indian war *believes* in *greater* courage than was there exhibited.)

But, in considering these two countries and peoples in comparison with our own, we require to be reminded of their failings and misfortunes.

In England, to-day, can we, as Americans, look forward with one-half the hope and confidence that we can in our own country? Are not our failings, as devilish as they may be, of a character to be removed in a great measure by a single election? We may be in so desperate a state as to induce a great reform and reaction at the end of our present "Ostend Conference" Administration, for example! But are England's evils of a nature that can be touched roughly? Is she in a position that bears handling? From her diplomacy during the past six months, one might easily imagine that she had received her *Ether* previous to undergoing the operation, but unfortunately some of the ills are of a nature that incur great risk in the process. After the profound error of separating herself from Russia by a war founded on antiquated ideas of the days of the Wellesley's diplomacy as regards India, and hence binding herself in Napoleonic bonds, she only waits the moment when the latter *might have* been changed into a positive position of equality (and making with Russia one of a tri-partite friendly alliance), by taking up the Italian question jointly with these two countries, to prove to France that she had at last awakened to her past danger, but was not sufficiently awake to the new position to avail herself of what Napoleon offered her in January of the present year. I hold that England's position to-day is not a safe one. I hold that she stands a mark for every country in Europe to point at as the probable next object of Napoleon's measures: I won't say his military attack; but for his *diplomatic* war, that England has brought on her-

self by her persistence during the past six months in doing her best to thwart his objects, after having declined his invitation to join in a cause that was essential to preserve Europe from renewal of the revolutionary war of 1848, and which she has professed herself most anxious to accomplish. By a "diplomatic war" I mean to say that Napoleon will teach us all, during the coming twelve months, that England has been quite in earnest in her prayer for "neutrality," so continually and unnecessarily *published* to all the world. What is the cause of our glorious old England arriving at the verge of that course of trials which her present leaders are the first to know she is approaching? It is truly because there exists still enough of the blind conservatism in that country to carry with it a fair chance of the policy of Pitt's administration and that nest-egg which he left as a heritage in the debt, being hatched in our day, notwithstanding the immensely powerful counteracting elements in communities like Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool.

No one can doubt that *The Times* newspaper is the indicator of the public majority; the House of Commons showed that plainly enough, up to the moment when Napoleon crossed the "Mincio:" but then it was necessary to cease the abuse of Napoleon personally, and change a Government that was fast opposing him in diplomacy. It is not probable that the change came soon enough. What is the indication, when we learn that forty-eight hours after the "Armistice" it was only known to Lord John Russell through the columns of the *Moniteur?*

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